



1937 - 2012

International Brotherhood
of Electrical Workers

Local 420

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March 20th, 2012

Good Morning / Afternoon Distinguished Members
of the Energy and Technology Committee:

My name is John K. Unikas, Assistant Business Manager of Local 420-I.B.E.W. which represents the Connecticut Light and Power Company workers for the western portion of Connecticut. I am here today to support S.B. 23 and H.B. 5544.

I was hired in 1971 as a linehelper and progressed to lineman by 1976. I was directly involved in line construction, maintenance and storm restoration until March of 2004 when I became a full time Union representative. I worked hundreds of storms over the years, including the ice storm of 1973, the numerous tornadoes that hit Windsor Locks and the Northwest corner of Connecticut and Hurricane Gloria in 1985.

I have personally witnessed the steady reduction of our line departments and other job classifications that would be directly involved in storm restoration.

I would like to focus on the serious threat to public safety due to the downsizing of the work force.

In March 2010, the Southwest portion of our State was devastated by thunderstorms which left thousands without power and numerous roads closed longer than necessary. For the first time in my 40-year career, the Towns of New Canaan, Norwalk and Greenwich held town hall meetings for their residents to voice their concerns and complaints about extended power outages and wires down blocking roads and driveways. These dangerous situations created a very serious threat to public life and limb.

In 2011, a thunderstorm rolled through the western portion of our State. The New Milford area work center, which serves the towns of New Milford, Sherman, New Fairfield, Warren, Kent, Roxbury, Bridgewater and Washington, was left in the dark much longer because of the shortage of linemen.

In New Milford alone, 35 roads were closed overnight which led to cancelling school. Schools were also cancelled in Sherman because of power outages and roads closed.

When roads are left closed, not only does commerce cease, but fire, police and ambulance service is also halted to the affected areas.

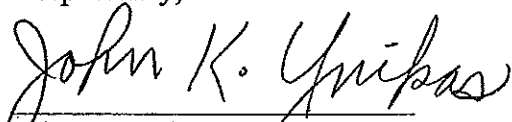
These areas where roads were closed because of wires down were not passable by vehicles, but many people were walking in close proximity to these possibly energized conductors.

I am imploring the elected officials of Connecticut to bring the existing staffing levels up to at least our 1975 numbers. In 1975, Local 420 had approximately 430 linemen. Today we have approximately 190 linemen.

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Our next grave concern is the so-called "Silver Sunami" of existing linemen. My prediction is there will be a large exodus of the existing work force and no plan in place to deal with attrition.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "John K. Unikas". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned above a horizontal line.

John K. Unikas
Assistant Business Manager
LU 420 – I.B.E.W.

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